

## Staying Healthy Starts With Prevention

“An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” This saying has been around for a long time and for good reason. In most cases, it’s better to prevent something from happening than to have to deal with the consequences. Think about your car: by getting a regular oil change, you help keep your engine running smoothly and potentially avoid expensive repairs that result from a lack of maintenance.

This same philosophy can be applied to our bodies. We can take steps that may help prevent diseases. Here are some ways your lifestyle choices can influence your health:

**Smoking or using tobacco.** Smoking affects nearly every organ in your body. Studies have shown that smoking or using tobacco products can contribute to a number of diseases including chronic lung disease, heart and vascular disease, stroke and others. Pregnant women who smoke can even cause harm to their unborn babies. According to the Centers for Disease Control, smoking accounts for nearly one out of every five deaths in the United States annually. By quitting smoking, you can begin improving your health almost immediately. In fact, within 20 minutes after quitting, your heart rate and blood pressure drop. After 12 hours, the amount of carbon monoxide in your blood returns to normal. Within three months, you can improve your circulation and lung function. After five years, your risk of stroke is that of a non-smoker and after 10 years your lung cancer death rate is about half of that of someone who is still smoking.

**Limit your alcohol consumption.** Excessive drinking can damage your liver and may contribute to certain cancers such as throat and liver cancer. If you drink and then drive, you’re putting your life and others at risk. Men should limit the number of alcoholic beverages to no more than two per day. Women should have no more than one per day. One drink is equal to a 12-ounce serving of beer, a four-ounce glass of wine or a drink with one ounce of liquor. Keep in mind that certain medications and health conditions may necessitate not drinking at all.

**Make healthy food choices.** Eating a balanced diet that is low in fat and cholesterol can prevent heart disease, certain cancers, stroke and diabetes. Your healthy food choices should include at least five servings of fruits and vegetables each day. You also should look for low-fat or non-fat dairy products, lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs and nuts. Become a label reader and check for products that are low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, sodium and added sugars. When eating out, look for foods that are baked, broiled or grilled instead of fried. Ask for dressings and sauces to be served on the side.

**Keep it clean.** One of the simplest ways to prevent the spread of infections is frequent hand washing. Good old soap and water can help keep you and your family healthy. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers can be effective and are great to use when you’re on the go. Make sure you keep food preparation areas clean as well. Be careful when handling raw meat or poultry and don’t cross-contaminate other foods by using the same utensils or cutting boards that were used for raw meat or poultry. Carefully wash fresh fruits and vegetables before eating them.

**Stay active.** Adults should get at least 30 minutes of moderate activity most days of the week. This doesn't mean you always have to be in the gym. Walking at a moderate pace can be an effective and simple exercise program for most adults.

**Take a shot.** Vaccines can prevent many illnesses. While most children get their immunizations because of school requirements, adults often forget that they need vaccines as well. Talk to your doctor about which immunizations you need. Recommended adult immunizations include tetanus/diphtheria, measles/mumps/rubella, varicella, hepatitis A and B, meningococcal, pneumococcal, and herpes zoster. Even if you had these as a child, you still need a booster to help keep your immunity strong. Annual influenza vaccinations also are recommended.

**Control high blood pressure and cholesterol.** If you've been diagnosed with high blood pressure or high cholesterol, you should follow your doctor's instructions on ways to keep these levels under control. If your doctor has prescribed a medication for blood pressure or cholesterol, it's very important that you take the medication exactly as prescribed and that you keep follow-up appointments and get necessary lab work. If you are having problems affording your medication, ask your doctor if there are less expensive alternatives that you can try.

**Get screened.** Early detection can mean that you have more treatment options. Some of the regular screenings that both men and women should have include blood pressure, cholesterol and diabetes. The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommends biennial screening mammography for women aged 50 to 74 years. According to the American Cancer Society, women in their 20s and 30s should have a clinical breast exam at least once every three years and beginning at age 40, women should have a clinical breast exam and screening mammogram every year. Ultimately, women should talk to their doctor and make an informed decision about whether mammography is right for them based on their family history, general health, and personal values.

Men and women should have a colorectal cancer screening beginning at age 50 and every 7 to 10 years after that. Men should talk to their doctors about prostate cancer screenings. Other screenings you may want to discuss with your physician include osteoporosis, depression and sexually transmitted diseases.